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AUTHOR Nomura, Masuhiro
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ABSTRACT

The question of how 'communication' is metaphorized in Japanese is examined and this metaphorization is contrasted with Reddy's (1979) conduit metaphor. A claim is made that there is a strong tendency for Japanese to conceptualize 'word' as 'fluid' and to fuse 'word' and 'meaning.' English, which unlike Japanese, has overt count/mass and singular/plural distinctions, provides indirect support for the claim. It is suggested that one way to revitalize the conduit metaphor is to see how other languages metaphorize 'word' and 'communication,' which will hopefully reveal in what respects Reddy's conduit metaphor is universal and in what respects it is language specific. (Contains 6 references.) (JL)

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# LANGUAGE AS FLUID:
## A Description of The Conduit Metaphor in Japanese

Masuhiro Nomura

Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to see how COMMUNICATION is metaphorized in Japanese and to contrast this metaphorization with Reddy's (1979) conduit metaphor. I will claim that there is a strong tendency for Japanese to conceptualize WORD as FLUID and to fuse WORD and MEANING.

## 1. Introduction

Communication is an abstract domain of experience which can be metaphorized in terms of a more concrete domain of experience. Reddy (1979) is the first detailed analysis of how our language about language is structured in terms of metaphor. He argued that English expressions of COMMUNICATION are based on what he calls "the conduit metaphor", which consists of the following four components (ibid: 290):

(1)a. language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another:
e.g. Try to get your thoughts across better.
None of Mary's feelings came through to me with any clarity.
b. in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts and feelings in the words:
e.g. Try to pack more thoughts into fewer words.
Don't force your meanings into the wrong words.
c. words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others:
e.g. That thought is in practically every other word.
The sentence was filled with emotion.
d. in listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words:
e.g. Can you actually extract coherent ideas from that prose?
I don't get any feelings of anger out of his words.

In (1a), the object of the act of transferring is "thoughts" or "feelings". Since words are containers for thoughts and feelings, as (1b,c,d) suggest, it is



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possible for "words" to be objects of the act of transferring (though Reddy himself did not give examples of this type):

(2)a. accept one's word for it.
b. He could scarcely catch the words.
c. We exchanged a few words.
d. He flung words at me.
e. give him a word of greeting/advice/warning
f. I hear that words passed between them.
g. He sent word that ---
h. You should never take his words just as they are.
i. toss a word to---

The expressions in (2) suggest that WORD is conceptualized as an <individuum> that people can give and take.

The aim of the present paper is to consider how Japanese exploits metaphors to talk about COMMUNICATION, and to contrast this with Reddy's "conduit metaphor". I will argue that there is a strong tendency for Japanese to conceptualize WORD as <fluid> and COMMUNICATION as a movement of <fluid> from a speaker toward a hearer.

## 2. Methodological Assumptions

I will make the following methodological assumptions:

(3) In some languages, there exists a set of predicates that specifically express the movement/state of <fluid>: e.g. 'leak', 'flow', 'spill', 'shower', 'pour', 'douse', 'soak', etc. [1]
(4) If such a predicate (henceforth "fluid predicate") is used in a metaphorical sense (henceforth "fluid metaphor"), its relevant argument is being conceptualized as <fluid> or indiscrete mass. [2]

English, which unlike Japanese has overt count/mass and singular/plural distinctions, provides indirect support for the assumption (4). [3] The following examples suggest that a fluid metaphor can occur with either a plural noun or a mass noun as its relevant argument:

(5)a. Crowds/People flow down the street.
b. *A boy flows down the street.

(6)a. A lot of good ideas welled up while reading this book.
b. ?A good idea welled up while reading this book.
c. Anger/Joy welled up.

In light of the above assumptions, compare, as an illustration, the following pair of Japanese expressions which have roughly the same meaning, "snap at someone":

(7)a. hagesii kotoba-o butukeru
biting word-ACC fling
b. hagesii kotoba-o abiseru
biting word-ACC shower

Since Japanese lacks the singular/plural and the count/mass distinctions as grammatical categories, the noun "kotoba" has exactly the same form in (7a) and (7b). The noun "kotoba" in (7a), however, can be considered to reflect <individuum>, because the verb "butukeru"(fling) typically takes an <individuum> (e.g., "isi"(stone)) as its direct object. The same noun "kotoba" in (7b), on the other hand, can be considered to reflect the conceptualization of <fluid>, because (7b) involves a fluid predicate "abiseru"(shower) being used in a metaphorical sense.

In the next section, based on this methodology, I will analyze Japanese conventional expressions of communication and demonstrate the ubiquity of fluid metaphors in conceptualizing COMMUNICATION in Japanese.

## 3. The Conduit Metaphor in Japanese

Reddy's conduit metaphor can be divided into two parts, (1a) and (1b-d). The former focuses on the movement of WORD, and the latter focuses on WORD as a container. In this section, I will discuss the movement aspect of the conduit metaphor and the container aspect of the conduit metaphor in this order.

### Movement of WORD [4]

I will examine fluid predicates one by one to see how they are used to metaphorize the movement aspect of COMMUNICATION.

(A) morasu/moreru (leak(v.t.)/leak(v.i.))

[4]

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The transitive verb "morasu"(leak) typically takes a <fluid> direct object:

(8) mizu/kuuki-o morasu
water/air-ACC leak
"leak water/air"

Hence the following example indicates that WORD is conceptualized as <fluid> and the speaker as a container for <fluid>:

(9) kotoba-o morasu
word-ACC leak
"utter words in spite of oneself"

Furthermore, the verb "morasu" has developed a usage as a speech verb, taking a complementizer "to":

(10) Taro-wa Jiro-ga gan dearu to morasita.
Taro-TOP Jiro-NOM cancer be COMP leaked
"Taro confided that Jiro has cancer".

The verb "morasu" can be combined with "kiku"(hear) and "iu"(say) to form a compound verb meaning "fail to catch/say some words" ("kiki" and "ii" are conjunctive forms of "kiku" and "iu" respectively): [5]

(11) daizina koto-o kiki-morasu
important thing-ACC hear-leak
"miss the important parts"
(12) daizina koto-o ii-morasu
important thing-ACC say-leak
"{forget to mention/let out} an important thing"

The image behind these expressions would be that WORD as <fluid> leaks from the conduit and loses some portion of it when it should flow to the hearer *in toto*. Interestingly, the compound verb "ii-morasu" has two seemingly incompatible interpretations, namely, "forget to mention" and "let out". The latter interpretation seems to be related to the fact that the verb "morasu" itself implies "to say something secretly", as seen in (9).

The intransitive verb "moreru", which is morphologically related to

"morasu", is used to express the situation where one utters words despite oneself:

(13) human-no kotoba-ga kare-no kuti kara moreru
complaint-GEN word-NOM he-GEN mouth from leak
"Words of complaint escape his lips"

The verb "moreru" combines with "kiku"(hear) to make up a compound verb:

(14) Taro-ga kekkonsuru hanasi-o more-kiku.
Taro-NOM get married rumor-ACC leak-hear
"(I) hear the rumor that Taro will get married"

The image behind this combination would presumably be that one hears WORD as <fluid> leaking from some source of information.

(B) nagasu (pour, let flow)

The transitive verb "nagasu"(pour, let flow) typically takes a <fluid> argument as its direct object:[6]

(15) mizu/ti/namida-o nagasu
water/blood/tear-ACC pour
"pour water/bleed/shed tears"

This verb "nagasu" combines with the receptive verbs "kiku"(hear) and "yomu"(read) to make up a compound verb meaning "listen/read inattentively":

(16) Taro-wa Jiro-no kotoba-o kiki-nagasu
Taro-TOP Jiro-GEN word-ACC hear-let flow
"Taro lets Jiro's words go in one ear and out the other"
(17) hon-o yomi-nagasu
book-ACC read-let flow
"read a book inattentively, skim through a book"

I surmise that the image behind these expressions is that the listener/reader lets WORD "flow", without stopping and accepting it. [7]

When the verb "nagasu" combines with the productive verb "kaku"(write), the compound verb "kaki-nagasu" means "write smoothly, dash off something".

This meaning is motivated by the image that one writes smoothly and quickly as if pouring water. For some unknown reason, the combination "ii-nagasu"(say-let flow) is not commonly used.

(C) kobosu (spill)

The verb "kobosu"(spill) typically takes a <fluid> and occasionally a mass-like <solid> direct object:

(18) mizu/gohan/*enpitu-o kobosu
water/rice/*pencil-ACC spill
"spill water/rice/*pencil(s)"

This verb can metaphorically be used with a noun meaning "complaint":

(19) human-no kotoba-o kobosu
complaint-GEN word-ACC spill
"to complain"

Furthermore, the verb has developed a usage as a speech verb:

(20) Taro-wa Jiro-ga urusai to kobosu
Taro-TOP Jiro-NOM noisy COMP spill
"Taro complains that Jiro is noisy"

The verb "kobosu" implies that one spills something which should have been contained. The reason that "kobosu" is normally associated with the notion of "complaint" might be that "complaint" is understood in Japanese as something to be contained and not let out.

(D) siboru (squeeze, wring)

The verb "siboru"(squeeze) takes as its direct object either a <fluid> or an object containing a <fluid>:

(21)a. suponzi-o siboru
sponge-ACC squeeze
"squeeze the sponge"
b. mizu-o (suponzi-kara) siboru
water-ACC (sponge-from) squeeze

"squeese the water (out of the sponge)"

When the verb "dasu"(let out) is added to "siboru", making a compound verb "sibori-dasu", only a <fluid> can be its direct object:

(22)a. *suponzi-o sibori-dasu
sponge-ACC squeeze-out
b. mizu-o sibori-dasu
water-ACC squeeze-out
"squeeze the water out"

Thus, the following expression suggests that WORD is conceptualized as a <fluid>:

(23) kotoba-o sibori-dasu
words-ACC squeeze-out
"force out one's words"

(E) abiseru/abiru (shower/be showered with)

The verbs "abiseru"(shower) and "abiru"(be showered with) typically take a <fluid> direct object:

(24) mizu-o abiseru
water-ACC shower
"pour water on"
(25) mizu-o abiru
water-ACC be showerd with
"pour water over oneself"

When uttering words to the hearer, these two verbs can be used:

(26) hinan/syoosan-no kotoba-o abiru/abiseru
blame/praise-GEN word-ACC be showered/shower
"be showered with/shower someone with words of blame/praise"
(27) sinratuna kotoba-o abiseru
biting word-ACC shower
"shower someone with biting remarks"

(F) haku (exhale, vomit)

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The verb "haku"(exhale, vomit) can be said to typically take a <fluid> direct object:

(28) iki/ti-o haku
breath/blood-ACC exhale, vomit
"exhale, vomit blood"

The following expressions show that WORD is viewed as <fluid>:

(29)a. hituuna kotoba-o haku
grievous word-ACC vomit, exhale
"utter grievous words"
b. kagekina iken-o haku
radical opinion-ACC vomit, exhale
"express a radical opinion"
c. honne-o haku
real intention-ACC vomit, exhale
"tell one's real intentions"

(G) yodomu (stagnate), nigosu (make (water) turbid)

The verbs "yodomu"(stagnate) and "nigosu"(make (water) turbid) typically take a <fluid> argument:

(30) mizu/kuuki-ga yodomu
water/air-NOM stagnate
"The water/air stagnates"
(31) mizu/kuuki-o nigosu
water/air-ACC make turbid
"make water turbid/make air foul"

WORD as <fluid> moves from a speaker toward a hearer, but it is not always the case that WORD moves smoothly: sometimes WORD as <fluid> can stagnate or get turbid, resulting in unsuccessful communication :

(32)a. yodomi-naku hanasu
stagnation-without speak
"speak fluently"
b. ii-yodomu
say-stagnate

"hesitate to say"

(33)a. kotoba-o nigosu
word-ACC make turbid
"speak ambiguously"

b. henzi-o nigosu
answer-ACC make turbid
"give a vague answer"

(H) simiru (soak into), kumu (draw (water))

Lastly, let us consider some expressions used from the hearer's viewpoint. The verbs "simiru"(soak into) and "kumu"(draw (water)) typically take a <fluid> argument:

(34) mizu-ga nuno-ni simiru
water-NOM cloth-DAT soak
"The water soaks the cloth"

(35) mizu-o ido kara kumu
water-ACC well from draw
"draw water from the well"

When WORD as <fluid> issued from the speaker is not accepted by the hearer, the compound verb "kiki-nagasu"(listen-flow) is used, as we saw in (16). When it is accepted, WORD as <fluid> "soaks into" the hearer:

(36) kanozyo-no kotoba-ga kokoro-ni simiru
she-GEN word-NOM heart-DAT soak into
"Her words sink into my heart"

When the hearer wants to take in WORD as <fluid> of his/her own accord, the verb "kumu"(draw (water)) is used: '

(37) kotoba-o kumu
word-ACC draw (water)
"take someone's words into consideration"

Container aspect of WORD

Compared with the variety of English expressions Reddy (1979) gave for the WORD AS A CONTAINER part of the conduit metaphor (which corresponds to (1b)-

(1d)), there are only a few corresponding expressions in Japanese that concern the relationship between WORD and MEANING (I assume that MEANING corresponds to "thoughts/feelings" in Reddy's formulations). Here are some examples:

(38) kotoba-ni imi-o komeru
word-DAT meaning-ACC load
(39) kotoba-ni imi-o takusu
word-DAT meaning-ACC entrust
(40) kotoba-ga imi-o hukumu
word-NOM meaning-ACC contain
(41) kotoba-no imi-o toru
word-GEN meaning-ACC take

It is very odd for Japanese to explicitly code the insertion/extraction aspect of the conduit metaphor:

(42) ??kotoba-ni imi-o ireru/soonyuusuru
word-DAT meaning-ACC put into
(43) ??kotoba kara imi-o toridasu/tekisyutusuru
word from meaning-ACC take out

This seems to indicate that in Japanese, unlike in English, WORD and MEANING are fused, rather than separated. Part of the reason for this might be that in classical Japanese there was a folk model where "kokoro"(heart, meaning) grows into "kotoba"(word)(see Ikegami 1988, 1989).[10] In other words, heart, meaning, and word were considered to form a continuum. On the other hand, if WORD is conceptualized as <fluid> as we saw above, then it follows, by the nature of <fluid>, that it is difficult to have clear-cut container/content separation in WORD. Thus, in this sense, it seems natural that there is no clear separation of WORD and MEANING in Japanese.[11]

## 4. Some Qualifications

The above analysis of Japanese conventional expressions of communication suggests that WORD tends to be conceptualized as <fluid> and COMMUNICATION as a movement of fluid from a speaker toward a hearer.[12] This contrasts with Reddy's conduit metaphor where WORD is conceptualized as an <individuum> and COMMUNICATION as its movement.

This does not, however, mean that Japanese never construes WORD as an

<individuum> or that English never construes WORD as <fluid>. Human beings can conceptualize the same objective scene in different ways. The fact that Japanese prefers <fluid> and English prefers <individuum> to conceptualize WORD is a matter of tendency.

In fact, it is not uncommon for WORD to be conceptualized as <individuum> in Japanese. The following expressions exemplify this: [13]

(44) kotoba-o okuru/kawasu/kaesu/uketoru
word-ACC send/exchange/return/accept

(45) ii-kaesu/watasu
say-return/give
"retort/order"

(46) hagesii kotoba-o butukeru/nagetukeru
biting word-ACC fling
"snap at (someone)"

(47) kotoba-ga mimi-ni tobikomu/todoku/hairu
word-NOM ear-DAT jump into/reach/enter
"hear"

What is important is that in Japanese the conceptualization of WORD as <fluid> is, at least, no less common than the conceptualization of WORD as <individuum>.

Here are, on the other hand, some English examples where WORD is conceptualized as <fluid>:

(48)a. pour out (a stream of) words
b. Word leaks out from CIA.
c. gush over(about) one's baby
d. a flood of words
e. a rapid flow of speech
f. His verse flows musically. / Her talk flowed on.
g. fluent ( < Latin: fluere 'to flow' )

It may, however, safely be said that the conceptualization of WORD as <fluid> is much less common in English than in Japanese.

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## 5. Concluding Remarks

To summarize our discussion, we have seen the following contrast between Japanese and English:

| |
|---|
| Tendency: Japanese: WORD as <fluid>. Fusion of WORD and MEANING<br>English: WORD as <individuum>. Separation of WORD and MEANING. |

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980:Ch.3) correctly point out, metaphor can highlight one aspect of a concept but hide other aspects of the concept. The conduit metaphor is so deeply rooted in English that it is virtually impossible to talk about language without using it.[14] One way of "relativizing" the conduit metaphor is to see how other languages metaphorize WORD and COMMUNICATION, which will hopefully reveal in what respects Reddy's conduit metaphor is universal and in what respects it is language-specific. The present paper is only a small attempt at this.

Finally, I would like to mention a possibility that the distinction between non-fluid metaphor and fluid metaphor might parallel the distinctions between count noun/mass noun and perfective verb/imperfective verbs (cf. Langacker 1987). These distinctions may be the different manifestations of the same cognitive capacity.

## NOTES

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1. By the term <fluid>, I mean both <liquid> and <gas>. Since <liquid> is more basic (in terms of visibility, tangibility, usefulness, etc.) to human experience, I surmise those predicates prototypically take a <liquid> argument, and that this prototype is semantically extended to a <gas> argument. Fluid predicates are sometimes further extended to take a mass-like <solid> argument. Compare the following pair:

(i) suna/*isi-o morasu
sand/stone-ACC leak

2. This assumption is based on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980:6) view of metaphor: "Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system." It is perfectly possible, however, that for some people fluid metaphors may be "dead" metaphors which do not evoke the conceptualization of <fluid>.

3. For conceptual basis of the mass/count distinction, see Langacker (1987, 1991:Ch.2).

4. The existence of the "conduit" through which WORD travels is supported by the following expressions:

(i)kotoba/kangae/kimoti-ga tuuziru
word/idea/feeling-NOM go through
"make oneself understood/get one's {thoughts/feelings} across"
(ii)tutu-nuke
conduit-going through
"(information) leak"

5. It is not the case that the verb "morasu" can combine with any kind of action verbs to constitute a compound verb meaning "forget to do something":

(i)a. kaki/yomi-morasu
write/read-leak
"forget to write/read"
b. ??iki/benkyoosi/korosi-morasu
go/study/kill-leak

It may be the case that (a) is possible, because the verbs "write" and "read" have something to do with language.

6. The verb "nagasu" can take an <individuum> direct object when it means "to float something in the stream of water":

(i) zaimoku-o kawa-ni nagasu

log-ACC river-DAT float
"float a timber in the river"

This usage, however, does not mean that an <individuum> object is conceptualized as <fluid>; in (i), "zaimoku-o nagasu" can never mean "pour logs".

7. To express "fail to hear/say", the verbs "otosu"(drop) and "nogasu" (let escape, miss) are used to make a compound verb:

(i)a. kiki/ii-otosu
hear/say-drop
"fail to hear/mention"
b. kiki/ii-nogasu
hear/say-let escape
"fail to hear/mention"

The verbs "otosu" and "nogasu" typically take an <individuum> direct object:

(ii)a. enpitu-o otosu
pencil-ACC drop
"drop a pencil"
b. ookina sakana-o nogasu
big fish-ACC let escape
"miss a big fish"

Thus, we may say that WORD is conceptualized as an <individuum> in the expressions in (i). Interestingly, the verb "miru"(see) cannot combine with "morasu"(leak) or "nagasu"(let flow), but it can combine with "otosu"(drop) and "nogasu"(let escape), to mean "fail to see":

(iii)a. *mi-morasu/nagasu
see-leak/let flow
b. mi-otosu/nogasu
see-drop/let escape
"fail to see"

The reason fluid metaphors like (iiia) are not used might be that we have a folk model according to which our visual field is occupied by clearly demarcated, discrete objects.

8. The verb "kakeru" is known for its polysemy (hang, cover, wear, sit, etc.). One of its meanings is similar to "abiseru": "to sprinkle, throw (water)". It takes a <fluid> or a mass-like <solid> direct object:

(i) mizu/sio-o kakeru
water/salt-ACC sprinkle
"pour water over/sprinkle salt on"

The following expression might be related to the above use of "kakeru":

(ii) atatakai kotoba-o kakeru
warm word-ACC ?
"give (someone) kind words"

9. The expression (37) is quite different from the English equivalent Reddy (1979) gives, namely, "Can you actually extract coherent ideas from that prose?". The verb "extract" can take a <fluid> direct object (e.g., extract juice from lemons) as well as an <individuum> direct object (e.g., extract a tooth). I suspect, however, that Reddy's intended image is that "ideas" are discrete objects taken out of a container.

10. Ikegami(1988) quotes a passage from the preface to Kokinwakashuu (a collection of waka poetry compiled in the tenth century), where "kokoro" (heart) is compared to a seed and "kotoba"(word) to its buds or leaves.

11. The fusion of WORD and MEANING in Japanese is best observed in examples (36) and (37), where "kotoba"(WORD) is used to mean MEANING(= thoughts/feelings).

cf. (36)' kanozyo-no sinsetu-ga kokoro-ni simiru
she-GEN kindness-NOM heart-DAT soak into
"Her kindness sinks into my heart"

(37)' kangae/kimoti/kokoro/imi-o kumu
thought/feeling/heart/meaning-ACC draw (water)
"take into consideration someone's thought/feeling/heart/intention"

Recall, in this connection, that, in Reddy's conduit metaphor (1a), what moves is "thoughts/feelings", instead of "words".

cf. ?Try to get your words across better.
?None of Mary's words came through to me with any clarity.

These sentences may be acceptable only when "words" refers to actual physical sound. See Note 4 (i) for the contrast with Japanese.

12. From this viewpoint, the following cliché makes sense:

(i) tateita-ni mizu-o nagasu yooni hanasu
vertical wooden board-DAT water-ACC pour as if talk
"(He) speaks fast and fluently"

13. In the following examples, WORD is conceptualized as FOOD/DRINK:

(i) kotoba-ga nodo-kara dekakatteiru
word-NOM throat-from be just about to come out
"words are on the tip of one's tongue"



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(ii) kotoba-o nomikomu
word-ACC swallow,drink
"swallow one's words"

14. For the various problems entailed by the conduit metaphor, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980: Ch.3) and Langacker (1991:508).

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